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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-11 AID-05 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-05 /078 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 6146

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH
SUBJ: ELECTION CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY: ELECTION CAMPAIGN CONTINUES AT SLOW PACE. IN CENTRAL PROVINCES MOST ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE COMING FROM MAJOR PARTIES. NEW FORCE CANDIDATES LARGELY NEWCOMERS, AT DISADVANTAGE AGAINST OTHER PARTIES. CAMPAIGN IN NORTHEAST MORE COLORFUL, WITH SMALL PARTIES DOING BETTER. SOCIALISTS SHOWING SIGNS OF HOLDING THEIR OWN AGAINST RIGHT WING PARTIES. ELECTION IN NORTH LOW KEYED, WITH GOVERNMENT PARTIES RUNNING FAIRLY HARD. DEMOCRATS ARE LESS WELL ORGANIZED THAN IN 1975. IN SOUTH DEMOCRATS REMAIN PARTY TO BEAT. SOCIAL ACTION AND SOCIALIST PARTY ALSO APPARENTLY DOING WELL. COUNTRY WIDE, U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL IS NOT RPT NOT YET AN ISSUE. THERE IS LITTLE INTEREST IN IT AMONG VOTERS OR CANDIDATES. AT THIS POINT IT APPEARS THAT MOST OF THE LARGE PARTIES WILL GET LARGER; SMALL PARTIES, SMALLER. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN CONTINUES AT A RATHER LETHARGIC PACE, WITH FEW SIGNS OF ITS PICKING UP STEAM YET, WITH ELECTIONS 18 DAYS OFF. IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES, EMBOFFS HAVE NOW COMPLETED SEVERAL TRIPS TO VIEW THE ELECTION CAM-PAIGNS THERE. MOST ELECTION ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE COMING FROM THE MAJOR PARTIES, I.E. THE DEMOCRAT, NEW FORCE, THAI
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NATION, SOCIAL ACTION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTIES. THE

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LAST-NAMED PARTY IS THE LEAST ACTIVE OF THE FIVE. NEW
FORCE CANDIDATES ARE GENERALLY WELL EDUCATED AND OFTEN BRIGHT
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, BUT THEY ARE LARGELY POLITICALLY UNKNOWN
AND THIS MAY HURT THEM IN RACES AGAINST MORE EXPERIENCED
OR WELL KNOWN CANDIDATES. SOME SMALL PARTY CANDIDATES ARE
ALSO STRONG CONTENDERS, AND THEY TEND TO RUN AS INDIVIDUALS
RATHER THAN STRESSING PARTY AFFILIATION. LARGE PARTY CANDI-
DATES NEARLY ALWAYS IDENTIFY THE PARTIES THEY ARE FROM.
VOTER INTEREST REMAINS LOW, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AREAS, AND
VOTER SOPHISTICATION MAY NOT HAVE INCREASED MUCH SINCE
THE 1975 ELECTIONS. ON BASIS OF PAST ELECTIONS RURAL VOTERS
TEND TO VOTE FOR SOMEONE THEY HAVE MET AND LIKE PERSONALLY,
REGARDLESS OF PARTY OR PLATFORM. MANY ARE ALSO EASILY
SWAYED BY LOCAL LEADERS. MUCH CURRENT CAMPAIGN EFFORT CEN-
TERS ON THESE LOCAL LEADERS, WHO OFTEN CAN DELIVER IMPOR-
TANT NUMBERS OF VOTES JUST BY LETTING VILLAGERS KNOW WHOM
THEY LIKE. THE DEMOCRATS REMAIN VERY STRONG IN BANGKOK.

2. THE CAMPAIGN IN THE NORTHEAST IS MORE COLORFUL, AND THE
LARGE PARTIES DON'T SEEM TO DOMINATE THE ACTION AS MUCH
THERE, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE ALL TRYING FAIRLY HARD. EVIDENCE
FROM KHON KAEN PROVINCE SUGGESTS THAT SOCIALIST CANDIDATES
MAY DO BETTER THAN MANY OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN PREDICTING. CON-
SULATE UDORN FEELS THAT THE UNITED SOCIALIST FRONT PART OF
KLEAO NORAPATI WILL RETAIN AT LEAST FOUR OF THE FIVE SEATS
WON IN 1975 (THERE ARE EIGHT SEATS IN THE PROVINCE). THE RIGHT
WING PARTIES, SUCH AS THE NAWAPHON BACKED MORAL SOVEREIGNTY
PARTY, WHOSE PRIMARY RAISON D'ETRE APPEARS TO BE OPPOSING
THE SOCIALISTS, DO NOT SEEM TO BE ATTRACTING MUCH SUPPORT
AS YET. THE NEW FORCE PARTY IS PUTTING UP A GOOD FIGHT
IN THE NORTHEAST, AS ELSEWHERE. THE DEMOCRATS ARE FIGHT-
ING HARD IN BOTH UDORN AND KHON KAEN, BUT THEIR PROSPECTS
DO NOT LOOK BRIGHT AT THIS TIME.

3. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE NORTH CONTINUES ITS RELA-
TIVELY LOW-KEYED PACE. AS IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, THE
THAI NATION AND SOCIAL ACTION PARTIES ARE RUNNING FAIRLY
HARD, AND ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE OVERALL GAINS IN THE NORTH.
THE DEMOCRATS APPEAR TO BE LESS WELL ORGANIZED THIS YEAR,
AND THEIR SLATE IS NOT AS STRONG AS IT WAS IN 1975. CON-
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SULATE CHIANG MAI FEELS THAT THE DEMOCRATS MAY LOSE TWO OR
THREE OF THE SEATS IN THE NORTH THAT THEY HELD IN THE 1975
PARLIAMENT (THEY HAD 15). THE NEW FORCE PARTY HAS IN
GENERAL FIELDED WELL QUALIFIED CANDIDATES, BUT AS ELSEWHERE
THEY ARE SUFFERING FROM LACK OF EXPERIENCE AND MAY NOT DO
WELL. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THEY MAY LOSE ONE OR MORE OF
THE THREE NORTHERN SEATS THEY HELD IN 1975. ONE INTERESTING
EFFECT OF THE NEW FORCE PARTY HAVING CHOSEN SUCH WELL

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QUALIFIED CANDIDATES IS THAT IT HAS FOFCED SOME OF THE OTHER PARTIES TO RAISE THE CALIBER OF THEIR OWN CANDIDATES.

4. IN THE SOUTH, THE DEMOCRATS REMAIN THE PARTY TO BEAT. THEY ARE RUNNING GOOD CANDIDATES, AND CONSULATE SONGKHLA ESTIMATES THEY MAY PICK UP A FEW SEATS AND WIN A TOTAL OF 21 TO 24. THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY ALSO APPEARS TO BE DOING WELL, AS ARE THE SOCIALISTS. THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY, AS IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, DOES NOT HAVE AS MANY STRONG CANDIDATES AS IN 1975, AND WILL PROBABLY SHOW A NET LOSS.

5. IN SPITE OF THE HULLABALOO IN BANGKOK OVER THE U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS, THIS QUESTION CONTINUES TO BE A NON-ISSUE AND THERE IS LITTLE INTEREST IN IT EITHER AMONG THE VOTERS OR THE CANDIDATES. MOST CANDIDATES SEEM TO BE STRESSING WHAT THEY OR THEIR PARTIES CAN DO FOR THE VOTERS AND ARE STAYING AWAY FROM PERSONAL ATTACKS. SO FAR, IT APPEARS THAT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY, THE LARGE PARTIES (NEW FORCE, DEMOCRAT, SOCIAL ACTION, AND THAI NATION), WILL MAKE MODERATE INCREASES IN THE NUMBER OF MPS ELECTED, AND THE SMALLER PARTIES IN GENERAL WILL BE FEWER IN NUMBER AND SMALLER IN SIZE. THE SOCIALISTS MAY BE THE BIGGEST SUPRISE, FOR THEY MAY BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR PRESENT REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT, OR SUSTAIN ONLY SLIGHT LOSSES, IN SPITE OF STRONG ATTACKS FROM THE RIGHT, AND EARLIER PREDICTIONS OF THEIR PIRTUAL DEMISE.
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